REDLINE LEADERSHIP L.L.C.

PROFESSIONAL GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT COACHING FOR PUBLIC SAFETY LEADERS

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Tip o' the Hat!!

This month's "Tip o' the Hat'" goes out to Blake Mertz of Brighton (CO) Fire Rescue District, for his promotion to position of Lieutenant.

Blake's passion for the fire service was ignited in 2002, when at 14 years old, he joined the local fire department's Explorer program. At 18 he joined a resident program and was hired at age 19 by Monument Fire as part time FF. In 2013, he took a career FF position with Grand Lake Fire Dept. where he progressed to the rank of Lieutenant. He met the love of his life and decided to return to the front range, hiring on with Brighton Fire Rescue in 2019. AT BFRD, he has filled the roles of FF/EMT, paramedic, and Paramedic FTO.



Blake holds an AAS through Columbia Southern University and is planning to pursue a bachelor's degree, investing in his professional development.

Outside of work, he enjoys coaching his son's baseball team, volunteering at the school, and serving as an active member of the church. A typical 4-day you'll usually find him with his family cruising around Horsetooth Reservoir on their boat or camping in the mountains, huddling around the fire making smores.

Words of Wisdom: When asked, Lt. Mertz told me; *"Never lose sight of why you chose this profession. Love the job, take pride in the work, and remember the purpose behind what you do every day. Your attitude is contagious, and the energy you bring through the door can set the tone for your entire crew. The first five minutes of your shift can influence the entire day- choose to bring positivity, enthusiasm, and a mindset that makes those around you better."*

Congratulations, Lieutenant Mertz! Now go get it!!

"I Took the Easy Road….And Was Lost!"

I was promoted to Captain at our merger in 2006 and assigned to the Station I had worked my entire career in. I was hoping to move out but they wanted me to help integrate the station into the newly formed organization. My crew consisted of some folks that I had worked with for years and a few new ones from the neighboring jurisdiction that we had merged with. I was very eager to do great work, learn some new people and grow in the new department.

Let me introduce you to the 2 characters in this story. I won't change their names to protect the innocent because I have a ton of respect for both. Working with them, I learned a lot about leadership as well as followership and am forever grateful.

One of the characters on my new team, who came from "the other department," was an individual I had only met once, was very high energy and just a really fun guy. I was a little anxious after initially meeting AJ, as I wondered if he might be just a little too over the top, but I am always up for a challenge. The other character was a guy I had known for many years, had even met before he entered the fire service. Greg is a master automotive finisher with the talents of a great artist with all things mechanical. Very calm, rational, intelligent and fun to be around, Greg retired ranked as a firefighter but one of the best I've known.

Back to the story…. we had a new team, a new department and a nearly brand new station that wasn't even fully set up at the merger. AJ was on it! He organized, labeled, organized some more, ordered station supplies, cleaned, and "PIMP"ed (story for another time) at a pace that was akin to a beaver with hyperactivity disorder. AJ could see the things that needed to be done, and he did them. He never blinked, worked high speed, efficiently making our "lodge" a place that was not only functional, but that we could be proud of. In

short, AJ was easy; he was always busy doing something productive.

AJ was so easy, I could go to him and ask him to do anything, and he would jump all over it. He never hesitated, never pushed back, eagerly pressed forward accomplishing anything assigned to him. At least he was, until one day. I approached him and asked him to take on a task for me and he said, "No. Get Greg to do it. He's just sitting in their looking at car parts." I. Was. Shocked! Then I wasn't. He was right.

He helped me recognize that I was coming to him, repeatedly, because it was easy…for me! Greg wasn't against doing work, he just needed me to point things out, give him the assignments. That's it. It was on me, the leader, to understand extrinsic vs intrinsic motivation and have the courage to balance my delegation, which really was my job. I had to put on my big boy pants and tell Greg the things I wanted him to do. I had to delegate effectively but importantly, fairly.

2006 was only a single year in my career but is one of the most impactful years of my life. I feel that I grew more as a leader in those 365 days than in all the years prior. Having to work with new people that I didn't know as well forced me to step up my leadership game. And to those people, the one that said "No" and the one that forced me to say "Do," I thank you.



CUSTOMER SERVICE: *noun: the aspect of business that involves providing support to customers.*

Is your CUSTOMER SERVICE leaving those you serve with the positive impression you'd like to see on the front page of the newspaper?

"Customer Service Is an Opportunity!!"



The other day I find myself standing at the counter at Starbucks and I've just ordered my coffee. I politely asked for extra room for cream so that my cup wouldn't be quite so full. The barista's brief response with "like extra, extra room?" To which I said ….

Meanwhile, during this exchange, a young woman and young man come into the Starbucks and lineup behind me. It's apparent that the young woman knows many of the people working at the Starbucks as they greet each other in a knowingly friendly manner.

….As I was about to reply to her question about "extra, extra room?" She says to the young lade behind me, "Oh, you dyed your hair? Seriously? It looks great, you should've called me." The barista and the gal behind me have an additional brief exchange, which wasn't really bothersome, but the barista never came back to, heard or listened to my response to question about "extra, extra room."

Quality customer service isn't hard. It starts with focus on the customer; unflinchingly focused. Being able to put aside those distractions around you so that you can pay attention to the person that is in front of you. Working diligently toward solving their problem, meeting their need, making them feel valued as a patron. Each exchange is an opportunity for your customer to make a decision about you and your organization. Give them something that sways their opinion to the positive.

Leader Spotlight-Fire Chief Ryan Woodey

I recently scheduled a meeting with Ryan Woodey, the new Fire Chief at South King Fire, to do an interview so that I could highlight him here in my newsletter. He accepted my invitation and the morning of our meeting asked if he could bring his Ops Chief, Dave Michaels, along as well. Inasmuch as I know Dave well, I said of course. For me, his action of bring his Ops Chief along, to an interview where he didn't know the questions or topics of discussion, demonstrated a belief in transparency.



L-R: Brother Scott, Sister Erinn, Daughter Elise, Ryan, Wife Christy, Daughters Abby and Zoe.

I opened our visit by sharing with him that I had heard his station visits were known as “Woodey’s Roundups,” referring back to the beloved Toy Story movies we all love. Chuckling, he said, “yeah, I’ve heard that.” Chief Michaels offered that he might just look for a Buzz Lightyear costume to bring it full circle. I can’t wait!

Before we got started with questions, we had a great conversation that wandered across many different topics. We had discussions about uniforms, professionalism, how you present yourself, mental health, psychological safety, and more. As we visited, I once again could see where many of Chief Woodey's values aligned with my own.



Chief Woodey wasn’t the kid that always wanted to be a firefighter, at one time wanting to be a law enforcement office. After college, he moved to the South Hill area of Puyallup and began working in sales. He recognized that the work wasn’t fulfilling and began to think he was on the wrong path. While not working his sales job, he was caretaking for his father who was suffering early onset of Parkinsons, and that is where he learned he wanted to help people. He recognized that caring for others was fulfilling.

Ryan spotted a sign recruiting volunteers and at age 29, he began his journey. He started with Graham (WA) Fire as a volunteer, joining alongside his brother-in-law. Prior to this, he had absolutely no exposure to the fire service. He was hired at Graham Fire at age 31, was promoted to Lieutenant in his first 5 or 6 years and to Captain after that. When Captain Woodey became Chief Woodey, it was as the Training Chief at Graham, which lasted until he was moved over into an Operational Battalion Chief position where he remained for 4 more years. Chief Woodey had ambitions to promote but could see the writing on the wall and knew if he wanted to advance, he might have to leave the comfort of his own organization. Ryan fondly remembers his last call at Graham as the response found him turning out with his Brother-in-law and nephew, who also worked for Graham.



L-R: Nephew Cole Richardson (TFD), Ryan, Brother in Law Thad Richardson

Leader Spotlight-Fire Chief Ryan Woodey

Chief Woodey hired on with Kirkland (WA) Fire Department as the Deputy Chief of Support Services which he said was the "best preparation to be a Fire Chief." He felt this way because it taught him a lot about strategic thought, budget management, finance, purchasing, contracts and more. Additionally, by going to work at Kirkland, he increased his understanding of the nuances of both a Fire District and a Municipality. He continued to grow with Kirkland, taking the position of Operations Chief when the previous Chief retired. He filled that role until moving to South King as the Fire Chief in January of 2026.



Wife Christy running Ryan all over town!!

I asked Chief Woodey what he did to prepare for his current position and found that while he is focused on higher education, he is also very aware of the value of having diverse experiences in your portfolio. As far as formal education, Chief Woodey holds a Bachelor Degree in Political Science from Washington State University, a Bachelor of Science in Fire Administration from Columbia Southern University and a Master's in Organizational Leadership from Arizona State University. Phew! That's a lot of learning going on!

Chief Woodey is curious. From my experience with Chief Woodey, he is humble enough to listen to input, even from a guy like me, often pausing our conversation to make notes. As a student of leadership, he enjoys gathering as much knowledge and understanding as possible by attending various seminars, reading, working with several different mentors/coaches and mentoring others as well. He is constantly asking questions, seeking clarity and using his resources to help him make hard decisions. On a path of personal growth and development, he truly believes "there is no finish line."

I asked Chief a couple of specific questions about what he wants to see in his team and followers.



Daughter Zoe showing dad how to run a half marathon!!

KB: What do you think led to your success?

RW: *"This one is easy to answer; other people invested in me because they saw something. Family, friends, coworkers. My wife is big contributor, a tremendous person, she's the opposite of me."* In short, people believing in and supporting him has contributed to his success.

KB: What do you want from people on your team?

RW: *"Work hard and be nice to people. Work hard, put forth effort, and be coachable."*

KB: What is most desirable trait/characteristics you want in a leader?

RW: *"Humility. Not discrediting people with your credentials (same rank, same level of success). Be able to walk with them." Chief paused and then continued with; "We respond to a lot of calls, we see a lot, I hope Fire Service is appreciative of what community gives us. I worry about that. I worry about the Fire Service ego."*

Leader Spotlight-Fire Chief Ryan Woodey

KB: Any final thoughts or Words of Wisdom?

RW: *"I like seeing other people succeed. Remember to enjoy the process. I am trying. Diversity wears a lot of hats; it's about all of one's experiences, upbringing.*



Christy took him to the end of the trail.

In his off time, Ryan enjoys being outdoors. He is a runner, a snow shoer, hiker and more. He enjoys his solo time as it is an opportunity to dive into his thoughts, reflect and clear his mind. However, he is always willing to take a partner along to include his wife or daughter. He also enjoys traveling both home and abroad and each trip is made better when it includes the whole family.

In the interest of full transparency, I waited to write this piece about Chief Woodey intentionally. I didn't want to hop on board too quickly, as I wanted to see how things shook out, see if he was a keeper. I was fortunate enough to meet Chief only week into his role at South King when I was out there to teach and was immediately impressed. It was obvious from the start that he was keenly aware of optics, perspectives, and the importance of first impressions. It was immediately apparent that he is an ever-growing student of leadership, has a clear understanding of his beliefs and values and is rock solid on them. He is focused on people over pieces but is willing to make hard decisions. He has taken time to get to know the organization and is working to develop an effective team. South King Fire deserves leadership, and I most certainly think they have one in place that will take them where they need to be. It won't always be easy or popular, but it will be a pathway to success. Congratulations Chief Woodey! I am glad South King has you in front! I think you're a keeper!





Have a leader you believe is worth spotlighting?

Send us a note at **k.body@redlineleadershipllc.com**